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Testimony of the Office of Child and Family Services
Department of Health and Human Services

Before the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services

LD 1712, *An Act Regarding Driver's Licenses for Individuals in Foster Care*

Hearing Date: May 2, 2023

Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer, and Honorable Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services, I am Dr. Todd Landry, Director of the Office of Child and Family Services. I am here today to provide information regarding LD 1712, *An Act Regarding Driver's Licenses for Individuals in Foster Care*.

LD 1712 would make a number of changes intended to increase youth in care and formerly in care's access to driver's licenses. These include an annual survey of youth in care and formerly in care with an accompanying annual report to this committee, establishment of a program to pay fees and costs associated with obtaining a driver's license, assistance obtaining skills and experience necessary to obtain driver's licenses, directing the Secretary of State to waive fees for licensing youth in care or formerly in care, requiring licensed auto dealers to contract with a youth in care over the age of 15-1/2 to purchase a motor vehicle, expanding the individuals who may sign a driver's license application for a youth currently or formerly in care, limiting the liability of someone who signs such an application, and requiring insurers to allow youth in care under the age of 18 to obtain insurance coverage provided they meet certain criteria.

OCFS appreciates the sponsor's recognition of some of the barriers youth in care and formerly in care experience in obtaining the pieces needed in order to drive (including driver's education, driving hours, a driver's license, a vehicle, and insurance coverage). This is an important issue and OCFS is currently devoting significant resources to addressing these barriers. OCFS staff participate in workgroups related to driver's licenses for youth in care in order to ensure that OCFS is offering opportunity for youth in care and formerly in care to have access to the same opportunities that all other youth have. OCFS currently has a policy in place to pay the total cost of driver's education, including funding for required driving hours, and other associated costs for youth in care and young adults engaged in the Voluntary Extended Care Program. OCFS staff are regularly supporting youth through this process.

Through this work OCFS has identified several areas where legislation could be supportive of our work in this area. This includes ensuring access to driving hours by addressing potential liability for an adult licensed driver who supervises those hours, providing alternate options for the signature requirement on the license application, limiting the liability of someone who signs the license application, and requiring insurers to cover certain minors who have completed driver's education. Several of these issues are addressed in this bill, which we greatly appreciate. In OCFS' experience (both with youth and in workgroup discussions) one of the most significant barriers for youth in care obtaining their driver's license is that insurers will not cover them as minors. OCFS works with

resource parents to address this barrier whenever possible, but often it is not (for a variety of reasons). OCFS also appreciates the inclusion of a waiver of fees by the Secretary of State and recognizes that the Secretary of State will need to weigh-in on this portion of the bill.

OCFS is not in support of the survey requirement and data reporting portion of this bill for several reasons. OCFS does not believe data would provide a complete picture as there are gaps in maintaining contact with youth who age out of the system (either at 18 or at the end of a Voluntary Extended Care Agreement at age 23 or those that exit foster care through reunification with parents or to other legally permanent families). Furthermore, we cannot guarantee that even youth we remain in contact with will respond to this survey.

OCFS recognizes the complex issues associated with youth in care or formerly in care obtaining a driver's license and is working diligently to address these barriers. This includes individual one-on-one coordination between youth in care or on a Voluntary Extended Care Agreement and their caseworker to address financial and other barriers, as well as system-wide work through Maine and New England workgroups.

Thank you for your time and attention. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have and to make myself available for questions at the work session.